



US Army Corps Of Engineers

Norfolk District



News Release

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Corps designates Temporary Danger Area around Plum Tree Island Refuge in Poquoson

NORFOLK, Va. — In an effort to ensure public safety, the Norfolk District Engineer, Army Corps of Engineers, working closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, today designated a one-year Temporary Danger Area around Plum Tree Island National Wildlife Refuge in Poquoson, Va.

According to Corps and Service officials, the action was taken because munitions exposure in shallow waters has increased, as has trespassing onto the refuge. Also, warning and danger signs have deteriorated and need to be updated and repaired.

In combination with issuing the one-year Temporary Danger Area, the Corps has issued a Public Notice to community members throughout Hampton Roads, and the U.S. Coast Guard has issued a Notice to Mariners.

In addition to these enhanced safety measures, the Corps will also conduct a study to fully analyze the current risk, based on the increased munitions exposure.

“One of the goals of the study is to respond to the Service’s request that we explore ways to safely offer public recreational opportunities on the refuge where feasible,” said Norfolk District Engineer, Col. Yvonne J. Prettyman-Beck.

Plum Tree Island National Wildlife Refuge, formerly Plum Tree Island Range, was used for aerial bombardment and gunnery practice from 1917 to the late 1950s. The Service acquired it for a refuge in 1972. Public access is not permitted on the refuge with the exception of Cow Island, which is open for permitted waterfowl hunting.

“We’re concerned primarily about safety. The current situation emphasizes the need to respect the serious potential danger inherent in former bombing ranges,” said the Service’s Joe McCauley, who manages the refuge.

Plum Tree refuge, located in Chesapeake Bay, consists of approximately 3,275 acres of low dunes and marsh, interspersed with small circular ponds created by aerial bomb impacts. The Temporary Danger Area covers the southern part of the old bombing range where unexploded ordnance is known to exist. The Danger Zone extends into the water 300 feet from the shoreline or deeded property boundary, whichever is greater. The former range has been designated as a Formerly Used Defense Site (FUDS) by the US Army Corps of Engineers.

Although the Temporary Danger Area is only being established around the southern part of the old bombing range, the refuge remains a “no trespassing” area.

The Corps is working with the Service, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, other federal and state partner agencies, and the City of Poquoson to develop a long-term strategy that will provide for public safety, and if feasible, increased public access.

Short-term plans include repairing and improving signs; seeking community feedback via the issuance of a Public Notice and 30-day public comment period on the Temporary Danger Area; and revising the Temporary Danger Area if appropriate. The assistance of the Virginia Marine Resources Commission and Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries has also been sought to enforce the Danger Area.

Long-term plans include conducting an analysis of risk (e.g., differences between the northern and southern half of the refuge) to determine if public access can be increased; conducting a Scoping Meeting with all stakeholders on the development of a permanent Danger Area; designing and implementing long-term risk management for the refuge; and removing exposed ordnance where feasible.

For the latest information regarding the danger zone or for permission to enter the area, contact Rick Henderson, Army Corps of Engineers Regulatory Branch at (757) 441-7653, or check the web site at <http://www.nao.usace.army.mil/Regulatory/PN/PN.html>.

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